

STUCK

Written by

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INT. OFFICE - EVENING

It's after hours in a large nondescript office space crammed with cubicles.

In one section a rather boisterous Xmas party is underway. Office workers, some dressed in blinking lights and reindeer hats, are popping corks, clinking glasses and getting down to the business of celebrating hard. All seems to be in high spirits except...

JONAS HARDMANN, middle-aged, middle management, sits grimly at his workstation intent on finishing his work. He stares at the monitor and gnaws on a pencil, seemingly oblivious to the good times on offer around him. In fact, it's only when he looks across blankly at an empty cocktail glass left on the edge of his desk by a tipsy PA that he indicates that this is anything other than just another hectic evening of overtime.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - LATER

The party is well and truly over, the gang has moved on and it's a quiet as a tomb.

Everywhere there are discarded glasses and limp Xmas decorations. Only the cheery face of an inflatable Santa with shaving cream for a beard is left as if to mock the still working Jonas.

Jonas finally rises, takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes. He is finished for the evening but clearly there is no satisfaction in a job well done. Slowly, he puts on his suit jacket over his work-soiled shirt, picks up his brief case and heads towards the exit.

Under the unblinking eyes of the slowly deflating Santa Claus, Jonas picks his way through the debris. At the dead heart of the party, Jonas pauses by a table and notices the last remaining piece of Christmas cake, still standing proud amongst the remanence of it's fallen comrades.

Carefully, almost lovingly, Jonas wraps the cake in some napkins and puts it inside his briefcase. He slowly closes the lid and snaps the clasps shut.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Jonas waits for the elevator. He looks up at the numbers and sees that both elevators seem to have stopped at the ground floor. He pushes the button again and steps back.

Catching sight of himself in the reflection of a plate glass window, Jonas frowns disapprovingly at his profile. He places his hand on his stomach and pulls it in.

A moment later, Jonas looks up at the elevators progress and sees that they're still stationary. Then, after what seems an age, the light changes almost painfully from **G** to **1**. He steps forward and pushes the button more aggressively, steps back and looks up again...

Jonas waits in an extended frozen moment.

Finally, he picks up his briefcase and heads toward the stairwell.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL LEVEL 5 - MOMENTS LATER

Jonas enters the stairwell and begins his descent. Behind him the exit door clicks shut.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Jonas plods his way down several flights of stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL GROUND LEVEL - LATER

Jonas reaches the dimly lit area at the bottom the stairs. Only a small amount of litter scattered on the concrete distinguishes it from the uniformity of the other levels.

Jonas moves quickly to the exit and goes to open the door. To his surprise he finds the door wont open. Bemused, Jonas puts down his briefcase and tries the handle again - same result, the door is locked.

Muttering to himself, Jonas takes stock for a moment, then tries again. He tries to force the door by swinging his body weight on the handle; but it doesn't change a thing.

Frustrated, he turns and quickly ascends the stairs, taking the steps two at a time.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

MONTAGE: Jonas tries each successive door on every level. Each failure is met with a growing desperation.

The last door at the top, Jonas's last chance, is assaulted with kicks and curses when it refuses to open. Sweating freely, Jonas yanks at his tie knot then pulls out a cell phone and furtively punches some numbers.

"No service" - Jonas almost implodes with frustration!

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas is stalking down the stairs, he stops at a door but this time he checks it meticulously; the handle, the hinges etc. He gets down on his hands and knees and tries to look under the door.

JONAS

Hello!.... Help!

Again the door and stairwell is as silent and unresponsive as stone. He checks phone reception once more - the "no signal" is accompanied by the low battery warning beep.

It's like Jonas is the last man on earth.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL GROUND LEVEL - LATER

Jonas is leaning up against the concrete wall urinating into a plastic bottle that he has found amongst the small amount of litter on the stairwell floor. He looks around awkwardly as he doesn't have a lid for the bottle, so he places it gently under the stairs.

Jonas inspects the exit door and notices there is lot of scuff marks at the base of the door and gouges around the handle. Maybe someone else has taken out their frustrations on the door.

Jonas repeatedly bangs his brief case into the door. The door remains unscathed; his briefcase is not so lucky.

Once again, he yells for help, his unheeded cries echoing off the concrete.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas sits morosely on the stairs. His tie is gone and his badly battered briefcase is between his legs.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas has settled into an awkward sleep, his jacket bunched on top of his briefcase serves as a pillow.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STAIRWELL GROUND LEVEL - MORNING

The tiny crack under the exit door slowly illuminates as the sun rises outside. It has no effect on the artificial light of the stair well.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - MORNING

Jonas is awake now but he looks as if he has slept in dumpster. He eats his cake, smashed into thousands of pieces, for breakfast. He takes care to scrap up all the crumbs inside his brief case and savors each morsel.

Jonas checks his phone again - no dice.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas is walking up the stairs, like a jailer doing his rounds he checks each door again. There seems to be much less urgency now.

His cell phone sounds of a Low battery beep.

INT. STAIRWELL GROUND LEVEL - DAY

Jonas sits in the corner rolling an old cigarette butt between his fingers. He closes his eyes and tries to swallow, but his parched throat makes it difficult. He opens his eyes slowly and flicks the butt.

Wincing slightly, he produces the plastic bottle full of his own urine and studies it for a moment. A look of disgust is replaced by desperation as he brings it to his lips.

At that moment, Jonas is disturbed by the sound of one of the upper doors opening. Wild eyed, Jonas can hear footsteps!

Jonas drops the bottle, yells like a banshee and madly dashes up the stairs. The urine leaks from the discarded bottle.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Jonas repeats the frantic episode of last night; yelling for help and desperately trying each door handle in turn. He even gets down on his hand and knees and tries listening for noise at the base of the door. There is nothing.

Finally, an exhausted Jonas bangs his head against the door in frustration.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STAIRWELL GROUND LEVEL - LATER

ECU of Jonas's deadpan face. The awkward repetition of his phone's low battery beeps is constant. A slight facial tick at each beep is the only interruption to a blank thousand yard stare.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL TOP - LATER

Jonas stands on the top landing with his cell phone to his ear.

The phone beeps.

He steps forward, stretches out his arm and deliberately drops the cell phone down the stair well. He seems to smile with grim satisfaction as he sees it smash into a thousand shards five floors below.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas walks down the stairs like the living dead, mechanically checking the door handles. Jonas stops dead, one extended pause, while he seems to contemplate something; then he trudges on.

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas stands motionless in the corner of one of the landings; his hands are clasped in front of him and his head bowed.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STAIRWELL TOP - LATER

Jonas finishes walking to the very top. He is counting each step.

JONAS

One hundred eighty eight, one
hundred eighty nine, one hundred
ninety...

Jonas makes a little circle at the top landing and returns to the edge of the stairs. He pauses for a moment then thrusts out his right foot before beginning to descend the stairs once more.

JONAS (CONT'D)

One hundred eighty eight, one
hundred eighty nine, one hundred
ninety...

He pauses for a moment then thrusts out his right foot before beginning to descend the stairs once more.

JONAS (CONT'D)

One hundred ninety, one hundred eighty eight, one hundred
eighty seven, one hundred ...

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL GROUND LEVEL - LATER

Jonas sits on the stairs and sifts through the small amount of litter; a bottle top, a spent disposable lighter, a broken umbrella, and a few scraps of paper.

Jonas examines the scraps of paper closely with a strange new interest, almost as if he has never see anything quite like it before. ECU on a fragment of yellowed newspaper - on one side shows part of "Birth, deaths and marriages", the other side shows part of a weather map.

Jonas pokes the broken umbrella with his foot, and looks upwards.

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas stands on the fourth step, the tattered umbrella raised above his head in anticipation of something stupid. He leaps forward, clutching to the umbrella like a sad vision of Mary Poppins. He crashes to the landing, as we

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL GROUND LEVEL - LATER

Under the watchful eye of Jonas; ECU on ants crawling over the leftover crumbs of cake on Jonas's napkin.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STAIRWELL GROUND LEVEL - LATER

The thin sliver of light under the exit door slowly fades.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas sits mindlessly on the steps. Small sparks fly as he repeatedly runs the disposable lighter down his leg.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas is curled up asleep.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas stirs a little as he changes position.

DISSOLVE TO

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas walks up the steps yet again. Strangely, the door handles seem to have disappeared.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas trudges up the stairs, still occasionally striking the lighter against the walls and himself. He stops when he hears the sound of rushing water. The sound gets louder and louder.

Jonas traces the source to a down pipe; he presses face up to the pipe as if to quench his raging thirst. His eyes well up with emotion.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas walks down the stairs. The doors, now, have disappeared; there is nothing in this world except bare walls and concrete steps. Jonas doesn't seem to notice.

FADE TO WHITE:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas sleeps the sleep of the innocents

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas wakes and finds a beautiful big orange placed on the step just near his head. Jonas snatches it up and stares at it with wonder.

Bewildered he looks around, then tears it open and greedily devours it's glorious contents... it is simply one of the most beautiful moments in his life.

Small droplets of orange juice splash into the concrete steps between his feet.

Jonas eventually looks up and sees that now the flight of steps seems to be unnaturally long.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - LATER

Jonas investigates; each flight seems to be longer than the last. Jonas is overwhelmed with the sense of awe... everything seems to seem almost limitless and full of life.

Jonas turns a corner to find the next flight of steps actually seems... to stretch off to infinity.

Jonas stops when he hears a rumbling sound; could it be the sound of rushing water?

Jonas looks down at his trembling hands.

Jonas looks up; it is not water but an avalanche of glorious oranges bouncing down the stairs in slow motion towards him. Jonas spreads his arms wide to meet them as to receive some divine benediction.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Jonas is standing mid-flight on the stairs. He is filthy and wretched. He stands, swaying in an unsteady stupor; neither going up or down.

ECU Jonas snaps out of it as he hears the sound of a door opening and footsteps on a upper level. He moves slowly at first, then begins to jog up the steps, taking them two at a time.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL TOP - MOMENTS LATER

Jonas reaches the top landing and is confronted with his old nemesis - the security door. He considers it for a moment then reaches out for the handle. This simple act has become tremendously difficult, he has been disappointed so many times before.

The handle moves with ease and Jonas hears the magical click of the latch moving back!

Jonas pulls the door open just enough to peer out into the lift lobby. He can see it's a brand new day and freshly scrubbed co-workers exchange pleasantries as they file from the elevator into the lobby. Jonas's appearance is a little different too; the more extreme nastiness of his subterranean life has disappeared and now he seems only slightly worse for wear.

As people begin to move into the office proper, building services are bringing out the trash toward the elevator. Jonas can see the faded party decorations and empty bottles. When the trolley is parked while the janitor presses the elevator button, notices the almost completely deflated head of the blow-up Santa in the top of the trolley. Jonas and Santa make eye contact.

As Jonas eyes the scene... he opens his mouth, pops in a section of juicy orange and munches away absentmindedly.

Jonas slowly close the door, the click of the lock echoes into the distance.

CUT TO BLACK:

JONAS (V.O.)
One hundred ninety, one hundred
eighty eight, one hundred eighty
seven...

THE END

